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# THE MONIST

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EMILE BOUTROUX

THE death of Emile Boutroux, the well-known philosopher and one of the most profound thinkers of modern times, will be regretted by all readers of THE MONIST. The one work by which he is best known is his celebrated thesis, *De la Contingence des Lois de la Nature*, which he wrote when quite a young man, about the same time inaugurating his teaching of high philosophy at the Ecole Normale. Appointed Professor of History and Modern Philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1888, he always belonged to the University of Paris, of which he was honorary professor at the time of his death—an event accelerated by the loss, a short time previously, of his wife, the faithful and devoted collaborator in all his activities.

He wrote a number of books which gained a high repute, among them *Socrate, Fondateur de la Science Morale*, *De l'Idée de Loi Naturelle dans la Science et la Philosophie Contemporaines*, *Science et Religion*, and *Etudes d'Histoire de la Philosophie*. A Director of the Fondation Thiers, he was brought in contact with, and exercised a strong educative influence on quite an élite of young men who lived there during the final stage of their career as students of philosophy. He was elected a member of the Institute in 1898 and of the French Academy in 1912. In addition to various other distinctions he was Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour and his name had recently been put forward in connection with the Nobel Prize.

His was a rare and singularly attractive nature, one quite unspoiled by the sordidness of so much we see around us in modern civilized life. Combining a delightful disingenuousness with profound erudition and insight, he exercised the most beneficial influence on the world of letters in France, while his engagements in England and America considerably increased his circle of friends and well-wishers. So magnetic and sympathetic was he that it was impossible to feel anything else than at home in his presence. He would give the best of himself and elicit quite naturally and unconsciously the best from his interlocutor. In his correspondence, too, is manifested an unusual power of self-effacement and interest in another's concerns. This precious quality effectually endeared him to the hearts of many; one had in his company a strange feeling of upliftment as though one were breathing a purer and more refined atmosphere.

That which, in addition to the sense of a perfectly balanced judgment, struck one most in his personality, was that the intellect had not been cultivated at the expense of the heart. Those who had read his illuminating sketches of Pascal and Jacob Boehme must be vividly conscious of the author's subtle mysticism and power to grasp the inner and hidden realities of life. Deep, too, was his insight into German mysticism and philosophy, only equalled by a Gallic clarity and power of exposition that sheds a flood of light on the most recondite of thoughts.

In his home and university life he was deeply revered by his pupils. During the whole course of the war, the Fondation Thiers was a hive of activity, for like practically every other public building in France it had been converted into a hospital for war service. While engaged as an orderly at the Hôtel Majestic in the Avenue Kléber, it was frequently my duty—and a welcome change—to conduct some of the convalescent wounded to a select concert given at his

residence, or to go there alone, when I had a little spare time, to enjoy the intimacy of his study and occasionally listen to him as he sang, from a collection of old French ballads, some of his favorite songs, such as *En passant par la Lorraine*, or the *Chanson des Métamorphoses*." or again *Derrière chez mon père (Les Trois Princesses)*. This he would do without any thought of musical accompaniment, just giving way to the impulse of the moment in a spirit of delightful spontaneity.

Altogether his was a life of singular usefulness and beauty, nor will it be easy to fill the place of a master from whose intuition and learning such intellects as those of Henri Bergson and Pierre Lassere received their inspiration. Unostentatious and unassuming, neither courting the public gaze nor appealing to the masses, he yet exercised a great and beneficent power both in his spoken and in his written words, and, if he did not actually create a new school of philosophy, he powerfully moulded the thought of his age and did perhaps more than any of his European contemporaries to humanize philosophy and ethics. He had considerable intellectual affinity with William James; a warm personal friendship existed between the two great thinkers of the Old and the New World.

His loss must have been keenly felt; and *emeritus* is indeed a term that may most fittingly be applied to so noble and devoted a character.

*Sit illi terra levis!*

FRED ROTHWELL.

LONDON, ENGLAND.